

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000844

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: COLOMBO CO-CHAIR REPS MULL OVER ISSUING STATEMENT
IN SUPPORT OF JOINT RELIEF MECHANISM

REF: (A) COLOMBO 834 (B) COLOMBO 741 (C) 04 COLOMBO

1997

Classified By: Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle
for reason 1.4 (d).

11. (C) Summary. After May 5 discussion of whether to issue a statement in support of the joint mechanism for tsunami relief in the North and East, Colombo co-chair representatives agreed that such a statement would be most useful after the joint mechanism is agreed upon (assuming that happens within the next week). All agreed that the potential pitfalls of issuing a statement before the deal is done outweighed the potential benefits. Charge' said it was imperative that nothing be done that would inadvertently weaken the President's apparent determination to move ahead on the mechanism. Charge' agreed to prepare and circulate a draft "after signing" statement to the other co-chair representatives over the next few days. In separate conversations, GSL peace secretariat head Dhanapala told Charge' a co-chair

SIPDIS

statement now would be extremely unhelpful. Presidential spokesman Peiris said a statement might be useful but the timing and wording would be crucial. CBK appears determined to move ahead on the joint mechanism. End Summary

Better to Wait

12. (C) Colombo representatives of the Tokyo co-chairs (Japanese Ambassador Suda, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar, Dutch Ambassador Blankhart, EU Charge' Wilton and Charge') met at Ambassador Suda's residence May 5 to discuss whether to issue a co-chairs' statement commending President Kumaratunga's (CBK) recent public statements in support of concluding with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and with the Muslim community a joint mechanism on tsunami relief in the North and East. (In discussion with Norwegian envoy Eric Solheim April 19, co-chair reps had agreed to consider at a later date whether to issue a co-chair statement on the joint mechanism.) Suda opened by noting that he had previously been in favor of a co-chair statement as soon as possible to support CBK's strong public statements and apparent determination to move ahead on the joint mechanism, come what may. After discussions with CBK confidants that made clear that CBK will be in delicate discussions between now and early next week, Suda said he had changed his view and now felt it best to wait to put out a supportive, laudatory co-chair statement after the joint mechanism is a done deal.

13. (C) Charge' concurred with Suda, noting that it was crucial that nothing, however well-intentioned, be said or done by the co-chairs that might give ammunition to the argument that the joint mechanism is being imposed by donors rather than an indigenous Sri Lankan effort. After additional discussion, all present agreed that the co-chairs should work to have a "post signing" statement ready to go the moment that CBK and the LTTE closed the joint mechanism deal. Charge' agreed to prepare and circulate a draft to other Colombo co-chair reps in the next few days. Blankhart cautioned that if, a week from now, it looks like the joint mechanism will not be concluded before the May 17-18 Kandy Development Forum, then perhaps the co-chairs should reconsider the issue of statement timing. The other co-chair representatives agreed.

14. (C) Brattskar advised the other co-chair reps that, once CBK is on board, he will seek to have a joint signing ceremony or will travel back and forth between Colombo and Kilinochchi in order to have a "same day" signing. The Norwegian said he

is "quite certain" that the LTTE remains firm in its willingness to sign on to the joint mechanism once CBK is ready, although the Tigers will not so signal in advance for fear of having the rug pulled out from under them.

Views of Two CBK Confidants: No/Maybe

15. (C) Earlier on May 5, Charge' held separate conversations with GSL Peace Secretariat chief Jayantha Dhanapala and President spokesman Harim Peiris to gauge their views on whether a co-chairs statement on the joint mechanism before both sides agreed to the mechanism would be helpful or harmful to CBK's efforts. Dhanapala was adamant that a statement would be very counterproductive at this point in the process. He feared it would sustain the (erroneous) public and editorial page view that the joint mechanism is something being imposed by donors rather than the result of negotiations between Sri Lankans. "The President has had some success in rebutting that view. We can't undercut her now," Dhanapala said. He also commented that CBK held lengthy discussions with Muslim politicians Ferial Ashraff and Rauff Hakeem May 4 and will go behind closed doors with coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) on the mechanism May 6. Dhanapala said he was optimistic that CBK, as illustrated by the personal capital and energy she is devoting to selling the joint mechanism, will sign the mechanism but "things are very delicate right now."

16. (C) Peiris took a slightly different view in Charge's discussion with him. He said a co-chairs' statement now would be "fine in principle, maybe even advantageous for the President." Such a co-chairs' statement might also provide a "safety net" for "reluctant stakeholders" like the Muslims and some in the political opposition, Peiris commented. But, Peiris stressed, the timing and the exact wording of such a statement would be crucial. On the wording, Peiris said that, in his view, any co-chairs statement should avoid any implied or explicit reference to a link between agreement on the mechanism and future development or tsunami aid. "That would cement the view that we are kowtowing to foreigners in exchange for money." In the same vein, Peiris opined, there should be no reference to the upcoming Development Forum in Kandy in a "pre-signing" statement.

17. (C) On timing, Peiris said he hoped no co-chair statement would appear before early next week. This would give CBK time to continue her rounds of quiet consultations. Moreover, not coming out with a statement until early next week would avoid having the Sunday editorial pages "rant about more foreign interference, which would be very unhelpful to our efforts," Peiris concluded. (Peiris called Charge' back later on May 5 to advise that CBK would be holding a joint mechanism "strategy session" over the weekend at which he would raise with CBK the utility of a co-chair statement. He noted that after the first conversation with the Charge' he had bounced the idea of a co-chair statement off of several other CBK insiders. All agreed a statement "on day two after the mechanism is signed on day one" would be extremely useful; opinions varied on whether a statement beforehand would be helpful.)

18. (C) Turning to the JVP, Peiris confided that a "mole" privy to the inner discussions of the party had told him that the JVP strategy, in the event CBK goes ahead with the joint mechanism, will be to "oppose us on the street" but not to leave the coalition. Peiris said CBK's view is that she can withstand anything the JVP has to do to maintain its domestic political base short of a collapse of the coalition. "We can ride it out," Peiris concluded. He also commented that a co-chairs' statement might also help with the JVP, although the leftist party would never admit to being "influenced by foreigners." In Peiris' view, the JVP in fact does care about international opinion and does not want to be perceived as a "pariah." He attributed much of this JVP sensitivity to the joint U.S./EU/Japan statement in December 2004 (Ref C) which had condemned the party for its role in stirring up public sentiments against the Norwegian facilitators. "That made an impact on them."

19. (C) Comment. We earlier had indications that Japan and the EU strongly favored a joint statement and we had been prepared to argue against the idea. Fortunately, that wasn't necessary. It appears that CBK is in for a long weekend of consultation and negotiation (there is a rumor she may call in the co-chairs as part of that; we just received a diplomatic note asking Charge' to come in the evening of May 9 for a "briefing" on the joint mechanism by CBK). All indications remain, however, that she is determined to move forward on the joint mechanism.
End Comment
ENTWISTLE